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ABSTRACT

This research presents finding from a preliminary study of the use of historical fiction in the middle grades. Focusing on historical fiction related to World War II and the Holocaust, the researchers sought to examine the factors that influenced teachers' decisions to implement historical fiction in their classrooms and students' responses to its use. Through observation in classrooms, in-depth interviews of the two teacher participants, and interviews of 14 student participants, the data gathered suggests that greater use of historical fiction in the middle grades is warranted, but that such use depends on more extensive and more flexible access to materials and continued teacher training in the use of groups. Problems of scheduling, lack of available materials, reading levels of materials, and discomfort in allowing students to work in literature response groups are cited. Suggestions for classroom materials are included. (EH)

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Historical Fiction in the Middle Grades

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Abstract

This paper reports results from a preliminary study of the use of historical fiction in the middle grades. It focuses on the factors which influenced teachers' decision to implement historical fiction in their classrooms and students' responses to its use. In connection with a workshop on historical fiction related to World War II and the Holocaust, we surveyed participants on their use of historical fiction and their understanding of the reasons for teaching history in the middle grades. In addition, we tracked each teacher to determine whether she implemented the methods and materials from the workshop, and conducted interviews and observations with the teachers and students in one school. We found that students had a highly positive response to the use of fiction, and saw important thematic connections between the World War II era and contemporary society. Many teachers were unable to implement the content of the workshop due to scheduling problems and the lack of availability of materials; other considered some books too difficult for their students or were uncomfortable allowing students to work in literature response groups. Our observations suggest that greater use of historical fiction in the middle grades is warranted, but that such use depends on more extensive and more flexible access to materials and continued teacher training in the use of groups.

Historical Fiction in the Middle Grades

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Historical fiction has been widely recommended in recent years as a means of teaching history to students in the elementary and middle grades. (See, for example, Freeman and Levstik, 1988, and the collection of essays in M. Tunnell and R. Ammon, 1993). The number of critically-praised, historically accurate works recently published makes such recommendations increasingly feasible, and fiction centered on World War II and the Holocaust is particularly abundant; a number of authors have recently reported on their experience using fictional works on the period with students in the middle grades (Cooper, 1994; Kornfeld, 1994; Kunczt, 1993; G. Tunnell and J. Ammon, 1993). There remains, however, little research on the factors which influence teachers' use of historical fiction. In this study, we attempted a preliminary investigation of teachers' decisions to use historical fiction in the middle grades, the obstacles they faced in implementation, and students' perception of the value of using such methods.

This study began in connection with a three-day workshop we offered on using historical fiction to teach about World War II and the Holocaust in the middle grades. At the beginning and end of the workshop, and again at the end of the next school year, we asked participants to respond to surveys containing open-ended questions on their use of historical fiction and primary sources, as well as their understanding of the purpose for teaching history in the middle grades. During the course of the year, we were also able to keep in touch with each of the teachers in order to gauge whether they used the materials

we provided. In addition, we interviewed a pair of sixth-grade teachers on their use of the materials and interviewed fourteen of their students regarding their reactions to the unit. We also observed briefly in the classrooms of these two teachers.

The Workshop

Offered through a consortium of local school districts, this workshop took place during the summer and provided teachers with professional development credit; those who signed up for it had selected from among several dozen choices. Thirteen people participated, ten of whom were full-time classroom teachers. (One participant was a librarian, while two others were resource specialists.) Part of the purpose of the workshop was to provide teachers with copies of books and primary sources they could use in their classrooms, yet our budget was hardly unlimited; as a result, we purchased enough copies of each of the materials so that each participant could sign up for one two-month period during the coming year in order to use the materials.

Participants began with a high level of interest in and knowledge of historical fiction. In explaining why they chose the workshop, most pointed to their interest in fiction dealing with the period or in learning specific ideas for its use. Nearly all had used historical fiction in their classrooms previously, and several specifically pointed to having used books on the World War II period; nearly all had used *Number the Stars* (Lowry, 1989), for example, and most had used *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* (Coerr, 1977). Others had used books on other time periods, such as *Johnny Tremain* (Forbes, 1943) or *Across Five Aprils* (Hunt, 1964).

Some participants also had a great deal of background knowledge of the topics. One was a member of a national committee on the commemoration of the Holocaust, and two others had traveled to Denmark in order to prepare to teach *Number the Stars*. Others,

however, had only general knowledge of the topic, and some indicated that they felt they needed to learn more about the period in order to feel comfortable teaching it. One teacher, for example, noted that World War II was an area in which she was "very weak," and pointed out, "History ended in 1940 according to many of the classes I have taken."

Most teachers identified citizenship goals as the purpose for teaching history in the middle grades. Some pointed to the need to pass on to students a general knowledge of the country's heritage; one, for example, described the purpose as being to "enlighten students of their heritage and the development of the nation as they know it." Most, however, saw history as providing a way of understanding the present and making decisions for the future. One participant, for example, explained the purpose as "to know where we came from and to make better choices about what the future could bring." Similarly, another teacher described the purpose as "to develop more understanding of the present and hopefully to avoid repeating past mistakes and to learn from them." Interestingly, two of the three teachers who worked in a secondary, departmentalized setting wrote that part of the purpose was to prepare students for later history courses; none of the teachers who taught in elementary, self-contained settings did so.

Our primary purpose in this workshop was to help teachers develop strategies for using historical fiction with students of diverse reading abilities, and to provide them with the materials to carry out those plans. By the middle grades, most teachers are faced with a wide range of reading abilities; we hoped to suggest how teachers could use a variety of tradebooks written at different levels in order to engage students in research and discussion of a related set of topics and themes. As a result, we selected books which dealt with the impact of World War II on children and were set in several different countries; based partly on cost and availability, we finally selected *Number the Stars*, *Twenty and Ten* (Bishop, 1952), *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, *The Summer of My German Soldier* (Greene, 1973), *The Upstairs Room* (Reiss, 1972), and *Goodnight, Mr. Tom* (Magoriam,

1986). We also thought that this set of books would allow students of varied ages, maturity, and reading ability to participate in the activities teachers planned. We also purchased sets of primary source packets, related to the Holocaust and Japanese internment in the United States, to accompany the novels.

During the workshop, we focused on modeling the strategies teachers might use in presenting these works. The inservice began with an overview of what we hoped to accomplish and our plans for sharing the materials throughout the year. Following that, the participants decided which book they would agree to read for the following day. They then reviewed some of the concepts of World War II which could be covered within the context of the books. Each book took place in a different country, so each participant next went to the library to begin looking for background information on her book (when and why the country first became involved in the war, for example, and the impact of the war on daily life in the country).

The second day, participants presented the information they had found and discussed how they could communicate this information to their students. They then shared summaries of the individual books and discussed how students could react to them. Part of the time this second day was devoted to using a list of questions we had developed to address themes which ran throughout the books; these included questions such as, "What kinds of mistreatment or discrimination did people face in the story?" "How did the people who faced discrimination react to what was happening?" "How did characters justify their discrimination?" We then engaged participants in a jigsaw activity, using a graphic organizer related to these themes which allowed them to share their insights with those who had read other books. This kind of discussion, for us, formed the heart of the workshop—helping teachers see how students who read different books could engage in meaningful discussion related to important themes in the social studies.

On the second day, we introduced teachers to the use of primary sources related to World War II. Beginning with objects from our own families—a draft induction notice, gasoline rationing forms, an identification badge from a chemical factory—we talked about how a close analysis of such sources can provide insight into everyday life at the time; we also looked at sets of commercially-produced sources on the role of women in the United States during the war, the Japanese-American internment, and the Holocaust. We then worked with participants in the periodical/microform section of the library to find their own primary sources related to the period. On the third and final day, participants shared the sources they had found with each other, discussed the remaining novels, and engaged in collaborative planning on the use of the books. Although we had hoped to make the planning portion of the workshop more extensive, time constraints led us to shortchange participants on this feature.

Implementing Historical Fiction

In the initial survey, nearly every participant pointed to time as a reason for not using more historical fiction in their classrooms. (Exclamations marks followed most of their responses.) As one teacher put it, “The *only* drawback that I see is *time*. It takes time to read a novel. However, well worth it!” Another pointed to the time needed to teach other subjects, and one teacher noted the time necessary for planning. Two also identified the cost of purchasing the necessary materials as a drawback to greater use of fiction.

Participants gave the workshop extremely high evaluations, and most planned to use both the materials we provided and the methods for using them. Some participants wrote on their post-workshops surveys that they would use “everything,” while several pointed specifically to the use of small-group activities; one teacher, for example, wrote that she would be most likely to use “the small group discussion and sharing of ideas when

various books are used." Few saw any major obstacles to implementing these plans, although one pointed out that "some books have adult themes and aren't appropriate for a typical fifth-grader," and another noted, "Some of the books may be too high level for our students."

In reality, many fewer participants actually implemented these plans, and there were several factors which influenced their decisions. One was the time of the year the books were available. The first teacher to use one set of books, for example, became ill during the first months of school and found it impossible to leave sufficient plans for a substitute to deal with the unit. She asked to have the books back if there was another time during the year when they became available, but this did not occur. Another participant was the librarian at a junior high school; she was very interested in the unit, but had to find a willing teacher to try it. She notified us that the teacher who had initially expressed interest in the unit resigned and she was unable to find another who could implement the unit during the time frame that the books had been assigned to her. She also was interested in using the books at a later date, but scheduling again made this impossible.

For two other teachers, the time when the books were available made implementation inconvenient. One fifth-grade teacher was scheduled to use the materials in November and December, but had another novel she wanted to use for whole class activities and decided to use it instead of the World War II materials. Another teacher ran into time problems due primarily to weather. Because of frequent school cancellations, she was unable to get through all of the background material she hoped to cover, and she was uncomfortable getting into the World War II era without covering the years preceding it in more detail; cancellations continued during the time she had the books, making their use even more difficult. (She did, however, reporting using the primary source materials and having a Holocaust survivor speak to her classes.)

The feedback from these teachers suggests that several concerns need to be addressed if the sharing of books as we had planned is to be successful. First, teachers who had not already developed some unit ideas of their own seemed to prefer to have the materials very late in the school year. Conversely, teachers who had already worked with World War II as a unit topic seemed more comfortable working with the unit in the fall. Second, even though the teachers agreed to the time frame assigned to them during the inservice, they often changed their schedules after school had started. Finally, weather needs to be considered better in scheduling materials to be shared: had we fully considered the possibilities of a large number of snow days, we could have allowed teachers who had the books during January and February to keep the books for a longer period. The overall problem, of course, is that resources are simply too limited: if each teacher had a complete set of all books to use throughout the year, many more would have been able to follow up on their plans.

One other significant problem resulted from teachers' concerns about the books we had chosen to use. Several voiced concerns that *Goodnight, Mr. Tom* could not be read by their students. They questioned their students' ability to handle the conceptual level of the book because child abuse was a factor in the story; in addition, the book was longer than the others and written in fairly complex language. These two factors made the teachers question whether the book was above their students' reading ability. Because the grade levels taught by the teachers ranged from fourth to seventh and the backgrounds of their students varied greatly, these were valid concerns. Feedback from the teachers who implemented the unit indicated that this was, in reality, a problem in some cases but not in others. One fourth-grade teacher simply opted not to use *Goodnight, Mr. Tom*. Two sixth grade teachers found that *Goodnight, Mr. Tom* was very well liked by stronger readers but did prove overwhelming for less able readers, who often were unable to finish the book. One fourth-grade teacher also voiced similar concerns related to *Summer of My German*

Soldier but reported later that her fourth-graders had no difficulty with this book. This teacher mentioned that she believed the press coverage of the 50th anniversary of D-Day facilitated her students' understanding of the material. She found her students capable of understanding much more than she had initially thought they could.

One other problem related to implementation was somewhat unexpected. We had purchased multiple copies of six books and expected that teachers would assign students to small groups—much the same way we had in the workshop. Our belief was that this format would facilitate cooperative grouping activities and leave the students with a greater overall understanding of the impact of World War II. As we talked with several of the teachers, we realized that some of them were still not comfortable with using small groups. Implementing the unit, early in the year in particular, meant that some of the teachers had to teach cooperative grouping skills at the same time they implemented the unit. Some of the teachers were uncomfortable with the idea that they could not directly supervise the students' reading of each book. These teachers were still teach reading primarily as a whole class activity; they read more literature than in previous years, but the whole class tends to read the same book at the same time. In addition, the teachers had had time to read one of the books during the inservice, but many of them had not read the rest of the books. Some of them felt that they had to completely read all of the books before their students did and some teachers were concerned with creating assignment materials. Feeling that they had to read all the books, create materials to use with them, and teach grouping skills simultaneously left these teachers feeling overwhelmed. We believe that if we had focused more inservice time on how to set up and implement groups, more teachers might have fully implemented the unit.

Using Historical Fiction at Elm Street School

One of the groups sharing materials consisted of four teachers who worked in the same elementary school; as a result, they were able to keep one set of materials throughout the entire year. (Two were sixth-grade teachers, and the others were remedial reading and special education teachers.) The two sixth-grade teachers worked together to implement the unit in some depth. Based on our previous acquaintance with them, they also were willing for us to observe in their classrooms, talk to them about their use of the materials and the problems they encountered, and interview their students. This provided us with the opportunity to take a closer look at the use of these materials in one school.

Elm Street School is located in a large city in northern Kentucky, and is part of the larger Cincinnati metropolitan region. The city is noted for the generally low socioeconomic level of its residents, and Elm Street School reflects this characteristic: teachers characterized most students as being from poor families, and over half received free lunch. The population of students in these classrooms was approximately 90% Euro-American (many of them Appalachian migrants) and 10% African-American (one of the largest portions of minority students in this region of the state).

The unit began in late November in order to coincide with the anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. For these sixth-grade students, the unit, which concentrated primarily on Japan and Germany, started with the construction of a KWL chart (Ogle, 1986) to ascertain what background knowledge they possessed. After that the students were divided into groups to browse through primary sources; the teachers used the two sets provided with the books and a scrapbook of WWII memorabilia kept by the grandfather of one of the teachers. The groups were given time to look at each set of sources, then moved on to another and later to a third. Later the students formed groups to do research reports; these reports had to include research, an illustration, and some other kind of art. The

teacher provided a list of possible topics, such as *Hitler*, *Judaism*, and the *Holocaust*, and the students requested the topic on which they would like to work. The teacher placed all students, including those mainstreamed from special education, into groups as close as possible to their first choices. In order to make certain the mainstreamed students were fully included in the groups, the teacher simply told students that it was up to the group to find a way for everyone to participate actively. Some of the students whose reading level was low were read to by other students, and they could then help with illustrations, and participate in the group reports. The reports were typed or rewritten into a final copy and short summaries were presented to the class.

The students also worked with their textbook, covering some material from units on Japan and Germany and material on discrimination and prejudice. Spelling words were chosen from the materials under discussion in relation to the unit. The students saw films about Japan, learned some origami and some words in Japanese, and worked with Haiku. The teacher sometimes lectured to fill in the background needed by the students and used a *Jeopardy* game to help them review the facts they had covered. The students also had chances to apply the information they were learning by writing postcards from the perspective of someone participating in the war in some way. The students also read *Number the Stars* as a whole class before breaking into smaller groups to read the other books.

The two teachers differed in the way they assigned students to smaller groups to read other books and in the activities they asked students to complete with the books. One teacher did not preview the books, but instead asked students to take turns looking at each of the books. The students were told to read the cover, look at the first few pages, and then to write a paragraph to the teacher stating their first choice for a book and explaining what made them think they could read the book. None of the students in this class initially chose to read *Goodnight, Mr. Tom*. However, three students, described by the teacher as very

strong readers, did end up reading the book when their first choice was unavailable. In reporting this strategy to us, the teacher said, "That turned out best. They got so into that books that they couldn't stop reading. They were like, 'I have to read more tonight.'"

Once the students had selected their books, they were asked to keep a reading journal in which they responded to sections of their books as they completed them. The teacher largely followed the questions recommended during the inservice. After all students had completed their books, the class completed a jigsaw type of cooperative grouping activity, also recommended at the inservice. First, each group was asked to chart responses to five questions about their book. After completing the chart on their own book, the students were put into groups which contained one person who had read each book to hear how the same questions could be answered about the other books.

The second teacher previewed each of the books for her students, they signed up for the ones of their choice, and the teacher matched them as closely as possible. Later she said she had put too much emphasis on *Goodnight, Mr. Tom*, since many of the students selected it as their first choice. This book did prove overwhelming for some of the students who then abandoned it in favor of a shorter book, *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*. This teacher reported that if she were to do the unit again, she would follow the procedure used by her colleague, asking the students to really examine the text and justify how they knew they would be able to read the book. The teachers reported that their students had difficulty, in reality, with only one text: they did not like *Summer of My German Soldier*. Even though the students did finish the book, the teachers described them as "muddling" through it. The teachers felt that the book was perceived by the children as more of a romance story than a World War II story. The students found it difficult to engage in the story and were reluctant readers of the book.

Even though these teachers had a set of books in the school, implementation of the unit sometimes became complicated. Weather was one factor. They spent almost two

months on the unit because of various weather and scheduling interruptions, even though they had planned the unit to last only three weeks. This meant the unit started in November and lasted into late January. In addition, scheduling the books sometimes became complicated. The two sixth grade teachers liked to implement units together, but had to rotate use of the books. One of the other teachers in the school who attended the inservice also used some of the books, and her instructional needs had to be considered as well. In spite of these complications, both teachers agreed that they would definitely plan to do the unit again. They believed that the students had learned a great deal about World War II and had found reading the books a very motivational way to expand learning history.

All the students we interviewed said they liked what they had done better than the way they had studied history in previous grades. One of their most frequent observations was that the historical fiction (and the activities, reports, and discussions that accompanied them) were superior to reading textbooks. Katy, for example, explained, "Well, I know one thing. We were very involved. We got very active. We weren't just learning out of the book. Our teacher was teaching us stuff that she knew." Similarly, Ashley pointed out, "This was like more, kind of like more hands-on, talking about everything, we had class discussions. Like after we did the activities, we talked and we shared our poems with each other and like we checked each other's work and helped each other." Matthew also noted that he liked history this year better "because we didn't always have to read from the book and stuff," Jessica observed that "when I was in third grade, I didn't want to hardly learn about history at all, cause all I did all day long was read books and stuff," and Clay explained, "It's better than just doing it straight from the textbook, it's boring doing the textbook." For these students, textbooks clearly represented an inferior form of instruction.

Part of students' interest may have stemmed from the fact that they began the year with some knowledge of and interest in the period. Previous research has indicated that students bring a great deal of background knowledge of history with them to school, and

that such knowledge most often derives from relatives and the media (Barton, 1994, Levstik and Barton, 1994); these students had also learned about the World War II era from such sources. A few mentioned having learned about the topic on television, and several noted having heard about it from relatives. Josh, for example, said that his mom had told him about it, while Darrell said that he had learned about it from his dad; Jessica explained that "my grandpa was in World War Two and he's told me a lot about it." Perhaps the most significant personal connection was that of Katy, who explained how the information had been passed down in her family: "My grandfather is Jewish and he was under the government of Hitler [...] and once my grandfather found out what Hitler was going to do to all the Jews, he fled to America. My mom learned all kinds of stuff from my grandpa, and then my mom told me."¹

Levstik (1986) notes that one of the most appealing aspects of historical fiction for young readers is its ability to allow them to explore the extremes of human behavior in a safe context. The students in this classroom were also drawn to extreme situations and characters' responses to them; when asked what they had liked most about the books, students invariably pointed to situations in which people found themselves in danger, and they way they and others responded. Several students mentioned the abuse suffered by the main character in *Goodnight, Mr. Tom* as their favorite topic. Clay, for example, said he "enjoyed reading it because it just told about the story of a boy and how he got free from his mother who beat him and he became a new boy." Similarly, Josh said he liked it because "his mom beated him a lot and I liked it when he went to Tom's house and Tom was real nice to him"; Scott said the part he liked most was "that there was a kid that was getting beaten and this old guy, he found him because he adopted him like, because of the

¹Previous research also indicates, however, that wars are one of the most confused and incomplete portions of elementary students' knowledge (Barton, 1994; Barton and Levstik, 1994), and these students appeared to be no exception. Gary, for example, explained that previously "I didn't know that it was World War Two, I just knew that Hitler did that, but I didn't know that it was World War Two."

war, and he bought him clothes and stuff and then he started getting to like him." Several other students pointed to the escape of Jews in *Number the Stars* as their favorite topic. Katy, for example, said that she liked "it that most people were trying to help them hide," and Justin picked out the passage in which "they run into one of the Nazis and the Nazi was talking to them and they tricked the Nazi, but the Nazis ruined their food."

Brophy, VanSledright, and Bredin (1992) found that fifth-graders had little understanding of why they were studying history or how history might be useful to them outside of school. Both Barton (1994) and VanSledright (1994), however, found a somewhat different trend: in those studies, many elementary and middle grades students made explicit connections between the past and the present, and some went so far as to explain that history could provide a guide to action. In the present study as well, most students saw connections between the important issues addressed in the fiction they read and present-day issues. We should note, however, that when we specifically asked students why they studied history at school or how knowing about history might help them outside of schools, their answers tended to be very pragmatic. Josh, for example, noted that "if you're on *Jeopardy*, if they asked you a question about World War Two, you could answer it, get some money, something like that"; two other students also brought up that possibility. Others noted that they might simply be expected to know the information someday; Justin, for example, thought that it would be important to know if one were to become a teacher, and Ashley made the same observation about becoming a librarian. Scott, meanwhile, thought that "when your kid goes to school, you can help him," and Tabitha said, "If anyone every asked you something, you'd know it." Larry suggested that if someone were to join the army, he might "already know some army skills and stuff"; both he and Jamie thought that learning words from other languages (as they had during the unit) would help if they ever visited those countries.

At other points during the interviews, however, it became clear that students had gained greater understanding from the unit than simple preparation for *Jeopardy*: many had considered the relevance of the time period for the present, as was evidenced by the fact that they responded so readily to questions about whether people acted differently in the past than now. Larry, for example, noted that "Like back then, like me and her [his interview partner] couldn't be in the same room talking and stuff because they felt like, people like her back then didn't like people like us. And now we can get along." Other students had reached the opposite conclusion; Justin, for example, pointed to "like blacks and whites, and skin heads and stuff," and explained, "They're all mean. Some of the whites treat the black people mean still." Clay also noted that "There's still racism and everything and the skinheads and the kooks like that." Similarly, in the following excerpt Josh and Jessica explain that prejudice is still common:

Interviewer: Do you think people treat each other differently now than they did then?

Josh: Not really.

Interviewer: Not really?

Josh: No. There's still racism all over the place. People talk about each other, and if you ask me, I think it could happen again.

Interviewer: What makes you think that?

Josh: Because, all the racism today, they ain't got nothing against it.

[...]

Interviewer: Do you think the way people treat each other is different than it used to be?

Jessica: No.

Interviewer: No, and what would make you say no?

Jessica: No, because the way we treat each other now is the way they treated each other back then. Some whites do not like blacks at all, and now, most whites don't like blacks and blacks don't like whites. It's just racism.

Several students went further and explained that knowing history would help prevent such reoccurrence. Ashley, for example, pointed out that World War II is important to study because "it shows kids nowadays like not to be so prejudiced with people just because they're different; give them a little room because sometimes difference is good." Darrell also noted that "I guess it just tells you that you should know about it and that you shouldn't be, you shouldn't just like, don't like someone because of their color or race or how they act." Matthew also thought history was something people study "to remember what people did so they like won't do it again or something." In the following excerpt, Krystal and Clay make a similar observation:

Interviewer: Why do you think World War Two is something people study in school?

Krystal: Because the teachers want us to learn about things that happened to our grandparents and to their parents and how people were treated back then sometimes, because we try to treat each other like that.

Interviewer: Do you think that knowing about World War Two or history would help you outside of school?

Clay: Yes, you can, you know that there is prejudice out there and that you're going to have to face it some day.

Interviewer: Okay, what about you, Krystal? Do you think that knowing about World War Two or history would help you outside of school?

Krystal: Yeah, because when you're outside of school and someone treats you like that, you can always think about it and sit down and talk to them about it.

Discussion

This study obviously can reach only very preliminary conclusions about the use of historical fiction in the middle grades, yet some of our observations suggest important factors to be considered in helping teachers make curricular and instructional changes. First, students' reaction to the use of historical fiction as the starting-point for instruction was consistent with the growing body of practitioner and research evidence on their reaction to and understanding of history: students enjoyed fiction and the related projects much better than the use of textbooks, they were interested in extreme situations and characters' responses to them, and they saw connections between the thematic content of the books and contemporary society. This suggests that greater use of historical fiction is indeed warranted as a means of developing interest in history and helping students see the topic as meaningful and relevant.

After considering the feedback we received from the teachers who attended the inservice and looking at which teachers were successful in implementing the unit, we found two factors which seemed to impact implementation greatly—scheduling, and the selection and use of materials. Having to schedule the books for very specific periods made it impossible for some to teach the unit. More books obviously would have made this a less significant issue by giving us a way to work around weather problems as well as other scheduling conflicts. Most of the teachers preferred to do the unit after they had had a chance to get the year started and get to know their students better. If we had more sets of books, some participants who did not implement the unit might have been able to do so.

This finding is hardly surprising, but reinforces the importance of having sufficient materials and allowing flexibility in their use.

Another important factor in implementation was the selection and use of materials. Several teachers were concerned that some books were too difficult (in terms of reading level or content) for their students. We did not necessarily share these concerns; we chose *Goodnight, Mr. Tom*, for example, precisely because we thought the topic of abuse provided a valuable and age-appropriate vehicle for examining the way people treat each other. On the other hand, we were not the ones teaching the unit, and participants' comments helped us realize that they were unlikely to use books simply because someone else thought it was a good idea. A more extensive selection of books would undoubtedly have led to greater use by the teachers.

Finally, many teachers remained uncomfortable with allowing students to engage in the reading of different books simultaneously; for many of the participants, the use of historical fiction remained tied to whole-class instruction. Only the teachers at Elm Street School—who already used small groups—extensively implemented the use of literature response groups. While other teachers considered this a desirable teaching method, they did not feel that they could teach the historical and literary content of the unit while at the same time teaching students to work in groups. For this component of the workshop to have been successful, much more time would need to have been spent on teaching participants how to set up, monitor, and evaluate group work.

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